

Derek Wallbank, *MinnPost*

Four Minnesota House Democrats voted to extend the Bush-era tax cuts for just those making \$250,000 or less a year last week, a vote that found a majority the House. Both Minnesota senators did the same over the weekend, but - stop me if you've heard this before - that vote couldn't muster the 60 votes needed to choke off a filibuster.

Stuck between 50 votes to pass and 60 to end a filibuster, President Obama brokered a compromise with GOP leaders that extends the expiring tax cuts for two years without exception, along with some additional tax cuts, in exchange for an extension of unemployment benefits.

MinnPost sent inquiries to every member of the Minnesota congressional delegation, and here's what we got: A big fat zero members enthusiastically embracing the deal. Most, including Sens. Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken, said they were still studying the proposal.

Others, including Reps. Betty McCollum, Keith Ellison and Michele Bachmann, voiced emphatic concerns with a framework that includes at least one provision each finds noxious.

"This is a deal that will continue to explode the deficit while the rich get richer and struggling middle class families get crumbs," McCollum said in a blistering statement. "The Republicans successfully held unemployed Americans hostage to give even more tax cuts to millionaires and billionaires. This plan is irresponsible, and I will oppose it."

Bachmann released this statement about the proposal this morning:

"Certainty must be provided to individuals, businesses large and small, farmers, and everyone impacted by the tax code. I called for the current tax rates to be made permanent for all Americans, but it appears a compromise for a two-year extension will be the temporary solution.

"It was irresponsible for Congress to adjourn in September and hit the campaign trail without finalizing the tax rates. The American people are tired of uncertainty, and this compromise on a two-year extension for all will at least offer a foundation for job creation for the immediate future.

"As part of the compromise, the President wants to extend unemployment benefits for another 13 months. Unemployment benefits are already at a historical length of 99 weeks, and the President's request would push benefits to three years. The President hasn't indicated any other spending offsets or reductions to pay for these benefits, even though he claims to be committed to reducing the deficit. Our economy doesn't have a moment to waste and it's vital that we stop these tax increases now, but we cannot overlook the consequences of another unfunded extension of unemployment benefits. Along with the American people, I anxiously await the final version of the bill that will bring certainty to our nation's taxpayers."

'Chilling prospect'

Obama said Monday the compromise was forced by the impending tax bill increases scheduled on Jan. 1 - calling it a "chilling prospect" for the American people.

"I am not willing to let that happen," Obama said. "I know there's some people in my own party and in the other party who would rather prolong this battle, even if we can't reach a compromise. But I'm not willing to let working families across this country become collateral damage for political warfare here in Washington. And I'm not willing to let our economy slip backwards just as we're pulling ourselves out of this devastating recession."

Make no mistake: this wasn't a 50-50 compromise. If adopted, Democrats would swallow a vote for tax cuts for the rich - an idea every recent Democratic presidential candidate (Obama included) and most in the party campaigned against. Yes, it's only for two years, but Dems also failed to decouple tax cuts for \$250,000+ earners (or even \$1 million+ earners) from the rest of them, thus failing to set up a show-me vote further down the road.

Instead, the debate in two years will be about extending existing tax cuts "for every American," a rhetorical debate Republicans are using this year, used in 2001 to pass the cuts in the first place and will undoubtedly use as the 2012 campaign season comes to a close.

In exchange, GOP leaders agreed to extend unemployment benefits for another 13 months. Is it a big ask? Maybe for some, like Bachmann, but it's a popular policy nationally. An

unemployment benefits extension had 60 percent support nationally in a mid-November poll.

Senate Democrats will meet later today to discuss the deal framework, which so far has received a cool reaction within the caucus.

"Now that the President has outlined his proposal, Senator Reid plans on discussing it with his caucus," Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid's spokesman, Jim Manley, said in a brief statement to reporters late Monday that conspicuously omitted saying anything nice about the deal.

Republican leader Mitch McConnell, in contrast, had a far more positive take, calling it a "framework of a bipartisan agreement to prevent tax hikes."

More on this is inevitably coming - remember this is just the "framework" of a deal, and actual legislation has to clear the House and Senate by Dec. 17, when the House and Senate are set to adjourn for the year.

I'll add to this report additional comments from the Minnesota delegation as I get them.